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Nutter To Realign \$200M For Public Education

By: Jenny DeHuff , The Bulletin

Philadelphia - Nearly every seat in the auditorium of South Philadelphia High School was filled when Mayor Michael A. Nutter announced 10 new initiatives for the public school system Thursday night.

Dubbing it "Philadelphia's Educational Promise," the mayor addressed teachers, students, school administrators and parents alike, many of whom, according to the mayor, have been mired in a poorly-funded educational system.

The mayor announced the city will allocate \$200 million for afterschool, summer and prevention programs targeting at-risk youth.

Accompanying him were School District of Philadelphia Superintendent Dr. Arlene Ackerman, South Philadelphia High School Principal Alice Heller and a complement of high school students.

"Education is the linchpin for everything we're trying to accomplish in this city," Mr. Nutter said, citing the efforts of Chief Integrity Officer Joan Markman for helping to restore ethics to Philadelphia's government and "rooting out the culture of sleaze" that has plagued the city and infected the school system for too long.

During the mayor's inaugural address in January, he set out goals of cutting the high school dropout rate in half. It currently stands at 45 percent. And within five to 10 years, he plans to double residents' four-year college degree attainment rate from the current 18 percent. This number ranks Philadelphia 92 out of the top 100 cities in the country.

The mayor urged parents to take better care of their children - a problem many parents in the city fail to do.

"Parenting is so important and so much more complicated; we need to pursue the "parent university" concept to help parents to get the training they need to support their children," Mr. Nutter said.

The Accountability Review Council, an independent group created by the Pennsylvania General Assembly to monitor reform of the Philadelphia School District, noted last month, "The school children of Philadelphia are, perhaps for the first time in decades, benefiting from significant strategic initiatives such as core curriculum, improved early childhood education, smaller high schools, improvement of school safety and climate, improved teacher quality, a greater opportunity for school choice and a stronger city-district partnership."

But the mayor said the goal is not yet achieved. Philadelphia has a 25-percent poverty rate, 45 percent of working-age adults are either not working or are not looking for work.

According to the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, more than two in three jobs in the city require higher literacy levels that match only one in two workers in the city.

Among his 10 immediate goals, the mayor outlined the following:

- * An early warning system aimed at identifying children in the sixth grade, who fit the profile of potential dropouts in later grades.

- * Parents will be informed of the potential dropout issue and children will receive assistance to overcome their educational deficits.

- * The city will realign more than \$200 million in funding for afterschool, summer and prevention programs.

- * More re-engagement centers in neighborhoods for young adults are slated to open.

- * The city and school district will secure more funding for educational operations for the returning school population

- * The "safe corridors program" will go into effect at schools in high-crime neighborhoods.

- * The number of student success centers will be expanded.

- * "College Ready Philadelphia" program will provide services for prospective students.

- * The city will develop a program to help its employees complete their college degrees.

- * The mayor's commission on literacy will work to develop a citywide literacy program.

"I can assure you the City of Philadelphia, the School Reform Commission and Superintendent Ackerman are as closely aligned as a city administration, school board and superintendent have ever been."